

SUBJECT: Commercial Breeding and Training of Horses on Williamson Act Land

In response to issues raised at a meeting of the California State Board of Food and Agriculture concerning the role of horses in California agriculture, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) the California Horse Council and the Department of Conservation (DOC) have worked together to develop a clarification of the California Land Conservation Act of 1965, otherwise known as the Williamson Act. (Gov. Code, §§ 51200 et seq.). The clarification is that the commercial breeding and training of horses (including training for racing as well as stock horses) constitutes a commercial agricultural use of property that is under a Williamson Act contract.

DOC suggests that horse breeding and training operations are analogous to the agricultural use of non-prime soils and should be treated as such for the purposes of the Williamson Act. The CDFA, which has asserted that the equine industry is within its regulatory mandate, supports this conclusion.

The boarding of horses, or the *occasional* sale or training of horses on the property does not constitute commercial agricultural activity for purposes of the Williamson Act, nor do riding facilities, equestrian centers, show arenas or event centers, or keeping horses or any other animals for personal use. In order for any such non-agricultural uses to be “compatible” with the “agricultural use” of the property, there must be some underlying “agricultural use” presently occurring on the property.

A more detailed description of the policy is attached for reference. As always, local agencies may adopt more restrictive local policies or rules, and may enter into contracts that do not allow, or limit commercial horse breeding activities or compatible activities. If you have any questions regarding this policy clarification, please feel free to contact the Williamson Act Program Manager, Dan Otis, at 916.322.5954 or Dan.Otis@conservation.ca.gov.